5: Hammond E-5 (1954-1956) 1959
FA28 Mossi FA28

the ancestral spirits, he is the principal political and religious authority within his lineage.

The single term *boodoo* is used to refer to three separate groups: the sib, the lineage, and the local residential kin group described above. Aside from formalized recognition of patrilineal descent and inheritance, the lineage functions most significantly as a local residential kin group in which the economic and social participation of the female non-members is as important as that of the men. Although the men are most prominent in the direction of its affairs, their wives have a considerable, if somewhat indirect, effect upon decisions made. Even in the relationship of the members of the lineage to their ancestral spirits (*kiemse*), the women play an important part in preparing the food and the libations to be offered. They give birth to the members of the lineage, nourish them until weaning (usually at the age of two), and provide them with guidance and training for their ascribed roles. In the education of the female members of the lineage the wives play a more important part than the men. But it is in their economic activities that the significance of the women's role is best seen. In addition to their farm work, they co-operate fully in repairing roofs, flooring the courtyards, and even assisting in the brick-making which precedes house-building. The economic and social contribution of the wives is of equal importance with that of the husbands and sons, and it is more important than that of the daughters, since females born into the lineage marry and leave just as they become fully productive members of their fathers' households.

Daughters, however, serve their lineage in a different way. As they are successful in winning for themselves a good name in the households of their husbands, so the bond of economic and social co-operation established between the two lineages at the time of marriage is strengthened. When they mature, they return to assist the members of their lineage with ritual obligations to the ancestors. If they are left childless at their husband's death, they may return to their father's household to reside.

Separated from one another by millet fields and the public way, the dwelling of each Mossi kin group has the appearance of a small walled village. Each round mud house with its thatched roof has a separate courtyard which is usually contiguous to the courtyards of the other houses in the residential unit of which it is a part. The individual dwellings are constructed in such a way—the wall of each house or courtyard being contiguous to that of the nearest neighbor—as to form a circular wall whose exterior is closed at all but two points. The dwelling of each kin group has a small exit and a large open entrance way just within which is located a thatch-covered sun shelter (*zande*) where the men of the lineage gather to rest, to work at small crafts, and to talk. Guests are

5: Hammond E-5 (1954-1956) 1959
FA28 Mossi FA28

342 592 [264] received, gossip exchanged, and social and ceremonial obligations discussed in its shade. Here also, the men of the lineage take their meals, brought out to them from the kitchens of their wives and set before them by their sons, who first attend their fathers and then dine on what remains.

592 252 [512] A few paces away is the grinding platform (*nere*) where the women gather to prepare the grain for their families' meals. This great circular mud table, some twenty feet in diameter, is raised about three feet from the ground. Its surface is beaten hard and worked over with cinders and manure to make it rainproof. Each woman has her assigned place at this platform where she keeps her pestle and where she stations herself at dawn and again at dusk to grind her millet and learn the news of the day.

592 Frequently found at the outer perimeter of the dwelling of the Mossi kin group is the house of the son of a lineage woman who has returned from his father's household to live in the benevolent presence of his mother's family, with whom he enjoys an especially permissive relationship. The house set aside for the residence of the young unmarried men of the lineage is also located on the outer edge of the compound dwelling.

555 184 A recent addition to the traditional pattern of village organization described above is the independent households of socially ambitious individuals who have chosen to separate themselves from the residences of their lineages in order to profit from their own economic or religious enterprises. Many have become independently wealthy through successful commercial ventures; others, as a result of conversion to Islam, have gained prestige through religious authority and wealth through the tuition and services provided by the Koranic students. Often these people are much younger than their lineage elders, not in line for the inheritance of political or religious authority through traditional channels, and unwilling either to accept the authority of their seniors or to share economically with the less prosperous members of their lineages. They are deviants, in conflict with the communal patterns of consumption and with the emphasis on accepting established authority which characterizes the traditional social organization of the Mossi.

THE TRADITIONAL ECONOMY

613 476 243 Much agricultural endeavor is necessarily co-operative. Each farmer is dependent on the assistance of his kinsmen to get his fields seeded, cultivated, and harvested in the short time during which each of these operations must take place. However, the yield from his field remains his own, to be shared only with his own wives and children. Members of the lineage also work in the fields under the specific control of the lineage elder. Although the harvest from these fields is stored in the granary

242 [i.e. at a sun shelter in the entrance-way. — Analyst]

belonging to him, he can be relied upon to share with the members of the lineage if this should be necessary.

Capital goods in the form of houses, granaries, and fields are the property of the lineage. Individual rights are limited to temporary use and custodianship but are passed on to others when a general shift in residence and role follows the death of a senior member of the lineage. Although property is passed on in accordance with the rules of descent in the lineage, part of the property redistributed represents the product of the labor of the lineage as a consanguineal kin group. For, as has been indicated, the labor of the wives, who are not lineage members, is as important as that of their husbands and children.

The lineage head discusses the coming year with the other elders, and an over-all production plan is made out. They decide what fields are to be left fallow, what ones are to be planted to cotton and the varieties of millet, what lands may be used by individuals desiring to plant a cash crop, and what, if any, land may be loaned to neighboring lineages or to in-laws. With the approach of the first rains, all economically active men and women go to their fields to prepare them for planting, leaving behind in the village only the old people and the children who are still too small to assist in the fields or tend their fathers' animals.

A considerable portion of the land within the limits of a Mossi village is under the direct control of the village chief (*Tenga Naba*) and the earth custodian (*Tenga Soba*), the local representatives of political and supernatural authority. This land is used for the public way, for the market place, and for burial grounds and latrines. Except for that which is too poor for any purpose, all available land within several miles of a village is put under cultivation.

Ki is the generic name which the Mossi give to the millet, which is the basic product in their economy and which receives the largest single allocation of land and labor of any Mossi economic activity. Two kinds of millet are planted, a large-grained variety (*kenda*) and a small-grained variety (*kazua*). Millet is the first crop to be planted after the rains have begun. Small- and large-grained millet seeds are frequently mixed and sown in the same field. Small-grained millet may also be sown in the same field with a white bean (*benga*). A "tired" field may be left fallow for five, ten, or fifteen years. When it is first replanted, it will be seeded to millet for the first three years. The fourth year it may again be put into millet, but if the previous crop was not good, cotton will be planted. Usually, a Mossi farmer plants cotton for two years, millet for three, then groundnuts, more cotton, then two more years of millet. It is believed that cotton renews the soil because of the intensive cultivation required: the earth is brought up into hillocks and turned over; after picking, the plant may be turned under and left to enrich the soil.

5: Hammond E-5 (1954-1956) 1959
FA28 Mossi FA28

they are so exclusively occupied with political or religious duties. In every case, they own fields and are dependent upon their produce for an important part of their subsistence.

Each Mossi village in the Yatenga holds a market every third day; markets operate in nearby villages on the intermediate days. There are few full-time merchants; men usually market their wares themselves and trade in items of European manufacture. Except for the sale of meat, it is a man's wives who sell farm produce. For marketing her husband's surplus millet, a woman receives a gift when the market closes.

Markets are most active in the early hours of the morning when meat and farm produce are fresh. By afternoon only a few merchants stay on, trying to sell their remaining produce to late-comers at greatly reduced prices. Social satisfactions derived from participation in the market are greatly valued; it provides an opportunity for meeting friends and kinsmen and for exchanging gossip and observations on one another's dress, the crops, and current political developments. The market is a place for making loans and receiving small gifts from kinsmen and friends, for flirtations and the arrangement of rendezvous, and for that casual sort of social interaction which is one of the principal pleasures of life in the Yatenga.

The Mossi farmer is dependent on the co-operation of the members of his lineage both for the success of his individual economic endeavor and for their support if his crop should fail. To be assured of this support, he must contribute generously to the maintenance of his position in the intricate network of rights and obligations which describes the relationship of the individual to his kin group. A constant exchange of visits and presents, ceremonial and economic assistance, and presence and participation in the affairs of the lineage are necessary to maintain his status within this group.

The nature of the social, economic, and emotional dependence of the individual on his kinsmen, his affinal relations, and his neighbors is such that his social well-being and economic success may properly be regarded as depending as much on his skill in manipulating this complex web of relationships as on his specifically economic endeavors. When a man decides to forego a second weeding of his fields in order to prepare presents and make the journey to the funeral of a kinsman, he is making a choice which, considered in the total context of the culture, is realistically in accord with his own economic best interest.

The farmer feels equally dependent on the deceased members of his lineage, the ancestral spirits (*kiemse*). If he feeds them a chicken, they may steal the soul from a neighboring stand of millet and bring it to enrich his own field. If properly treated, they can be depended upon to protect his shea nut trees from the high winds which might otherwise

8: Skinner E-5 (1955-1957) 1958
FA28 Mossi FA28

Karême), celebrate the great festival of Ramadan and the lesser festivals, and aspire to make the pilgrimage to Mecca. Most of the Moslems can lead prayers, but only about one-tenth of their number can read and recite the Koran. However, today the masters (*karasambas*) of the 32 Koranic schools in the district are endeavoring to instruct the many boys and few girls in reading the Koran and understanding Moslem theology.

The Karême is observed by most adult Moslems in the community with the exception of invalids and working men. Moslems say that the fast is intended to turn the minds of the people to God, and they distinguish between the Moslems "of the mouth" who break the fast and those "of the heart" who fast until Ramadan. The crescent moon of Ramadan is greeted with guns and general rejoicing and the following morning the Moslems gather at the tomb of Ngado to give praises to God; during the rest of the day they pay homage to the chief and visit their friends. However, a change in the traditional observance of Ramadan is expected, because one of the Moslem leaders objects to the ceremony at the tomb of Ngado. He feels that some Moslems are beginning to regard the tomb of the first Moslem as an earth shrine or Tengkougre.

So far, only five of the more prominent Moslems in the district have made or are making the pilgrimage to Mecca. The first man made the voyage about seven years ago, and is now conducting a Koranic school in a neighboring district. His brother went to Mecca about two years ago and is now the senior *El Hadj* in the district. Of the two men who were on the pilgrimage when I arrived in the district, one has since died near the Red Sea and the other is still away. One other man left for Mecca and returned to the district during my stay. Most of the pilgrims now fly to Mecca; only two men followed the traditional route through Ghana, Kano, Lake Chad, the Anglo-Egyptian Sudan (now Sudan), and on to Mecca. In general, all pilgrims have used their own resources for the trip, but they receive some help from their lineage brothers and from the other Moslems in the district and in Ouagadougou.

The pilgrimage to Mecca represents the greatest event in the lives of the district Moslems. When the last pilgrim left, a great crowd gathered at his house and prayed for his safe journey, and some even accompanied him to Ouagadougou and remained there until he left. The Moslems and many pagans of the district, under the command of the district chief, cultivated his fields during his absence. And when the new El Hadj returned, a large crowd accompanied him to his house with shouts of joy. There he killed a sheep in thanksgiving, sprinkled the crowd with holy water from Mecca, and recounted his experiences. His listeners were impressed by his airplane flight and the description of Mecca, but they showed the greatest interest when he said that Mecca women covered their faces and that most Meccan men were monogamous. The local Moslems smiled when they heard this bit of news from one of their members, but I have seen them scowl when discussing the monogamous practice desired by the Christians.

The attitudes of Moslems differ very little from those of the other Mossi as regards children and polygyny. They say that they do not believe in the

9:Skinner E-5 (1955-1957)1960 FA28 Mossi FA28

631
643 the sons of the ruling family, the *nakomces,* formed a noble class, above
565 classes of commoners, serfs, and slaves. Classed among the commoners in many villages were the descendants of former district chiefs who had been deposed by the Moro Nabas. The reason that the rulers gave for the deposal of district chiefs was always disloyalty; but everyone recognized that this was an excuse whereby the reigning sublineage deposed older branches and provided positions for its cadet or collateral branches.

631 The governing hierarchy of the Mossi was a lineage with its com-
613 ponent minor and minimal branches. Like most lineages, this ruling lineage possessed an ideology that all of its members had equal access to its corporate assets. The most important asset of this lineage was, of course, its sovereignty, its right to rule. The *nam* is the symbol of Mossi sovereignty and is described by them as "that force of God which enables a mere man to rule over other men." The *nam* was the possession of Wedraogo, the group's founder, and of Moro Naba Wubri, the first ruler of Wagadougou, and this possession became the patrimony of all their descendants. This being the case, the ruling chief of any village, district, principality, or kingdom did not own the *nam* of that area; he was considered the temporary holder of it, and on his death it reverted to the collective descendants of the royal ancestors.
428 A man did not have the right to pass the *nam* on to any person because
424 it was not his. Whenever a Mossi chief was being considered for office his commoner electors asked him the following questions: "Before his death, did Naba X designate anyone to replace him as chief?" This question was asked three times, and the candidate responded three times: "No! The Naba did not designate anyone. You may name anyone you wish; even if he is a blind man or a leper."

In actuality, this vaunted equality of access to the *nam* by all members of the ruling lineage was a legal fiction. And despite the fact that all the nobles declared that they could go to Wagadougou to seek the *nam* whenever a chief died, in reality only the members of the dead chief's minimal lineage (often the descendants of his grandfather) presented themselves as candidates. Indeed, of all the candidates, the eldest son of the dead ruler was the one most often chosen to be

9:Skinner E-5 (1955-1957) 1960 FA28 Mossi FA28

chief. If he was not qualified then one of his younger brothers, or one of father's brothers or uncles was chosen. Yet, the fiction of equal access to the *nam* was important to the Mossi because it enabled them to adhere to their most important political axiom which was that "The only man who should rule is one who can keep the country." Regencies were avoided, and persons with physical and character defects were barred. Moreover, this flexibility gave the electors a wide choice of candidates from which to choose the person best fitted for chieftainship at any given period. The Mossi have always believed that it is difficult to rule men and this is what they mean when they declare: "Nanamsè toumdè ya yida fa fa"—"The work of the chiefs is the most difficult of all."[3] For example, it does not seem like an accident that the first ruler, Moro Naba Wubri, was succeeded by four of his brothers in turn instead of by his sons. The Mossi had not completely conquered the territory, and the young sons were incapable of handling the complex political situation. The graves of each of the successors to Wubri in different parts of the country remain as markers to testify to the difficult task which the early rulers had in controlling their realm.

The Mossi believed, and still do believe, that it was only when conflict developed after a ruler died, that the people realized how necessary and valuable a chief was. The death of a chief, especially of the Moro Naba, was kept a secret until the war minister arrived at the capital with his troops. Only then did the cry go up: "The fire has gone out!"; and as soon as it was heard, violence broke out throughout the land. Prisoners were released, thieves rifled the markets, and the *nakomcses*, or nobles, rode about the countryside doing whatever they wished. This custom persisted as late as 1942. Reporting to his superior in Abijan about the events that transpired in Wagadougou when Moro Naba Kom died, the French commander wrote: "On Friday, March 13, 1942, young people, profiting from old custom, tried to steal things, but they were stopped and about one hundred were arrested."[4] Throughout all the chaos which attended the death of a king, the war minister remained calm unless an attempt was actually made to seize power. He never attempted to stop the public disorder or to catch thieves or murderers, because everyone believed that out of

10:Hammond E-5 (1954-1956) 1964 FA28 Mossi FA28
Yatenga

tween the Mossi and several other ethnic groups. In each instance the structural relationship in which joking occurs is characterized by the five features listed above.

Joking with the Mother's Brother

The relationship with a maternal uncle is marked by all five of the structural features mentioned. Separation results from the rules of patrilineal descent and inheritance rules, from patrisib exogamy, and from the general observance of patrilocal residence. The relationship is reciprocal in that a mother's brother serves throughout Ego's life as an important alternative source of emotional, economic, and social support: he often acts as intermediary in disputes between Ego and his parents or the elders of his lineage; he gives Ego frequent gifts; and residence in the mother's patriclan is the most frequent alternative to patrilocality. In turn Ego, as a result of the permissive relationship he enjoys with the spirits of his deceased cognatic kinsmen, often serves their living descendants as an intermediary in their ritual efforts to maintain a secure relationship with the ancestral spirits.

Ambivalence between Ego and his mother's brother and her other kin results from the conflicting sources of "conjunction" and "dissociation" just mentioned. The conflict between a strong affective bond—a "feeling" of kinship—and a system of inheritance which denies it jural recognition generates frustration. The ambivalence in the relationship is manifested not only by joking, which is asymmetrical—with Ego being the more aggressive—but by theft as well. Perhaps as partial compensation for his inability to inherit matrilaterally, Ego is permitted to steal his mother's brother's property during his lifetime and can also make off with the beer and some of the animals collected for his funeral.

As for equality of status, the descent groups of Ego and mother's brother are structurally equivalent. Although their respective positions within these two groups differ, the permissiveness of Ego's relationship to his maternal uncle absolves him from recognition of the canons of comportment that otherwise prevail among the Mossi in relations between persons of differing status. Indeed, disregard for such status differences is part of the "joke." Independence is assured by the fact that Ego and his mother's brother are members of autonomous descent groups and that each is responsive only to the authority of his respective lineage elders.

Joking with a Mother's Brother's Wife

Joking between Ego and his mother's brother's wife is to be regarded as a separate relationship because of her nonmembership in the mother's brother's descent group, but certain of the structural circumstances are similar. The source of separation from the mother's brother's wife is evident. The reciprocal tie that unites them is indirect; when Ego is received warmly in his mother's brother's household it is the wife of the latter who prepares the food he is given. Similarly, as a member of her husband's patriclan, she benefits

10:Hammond E-5 (1954-1956) 1964 FA28 Mossi FA28
Yatenga

tradition of hostility. Such groups obviously have both equal and mutually independent status.

The Processes of Mossi Joking

I have already suggested that the significance of joking as an adjustive mechanism is derived from the manner in which it provides concurrently for the operation of three interrelated but analytically separable processes. These are *communication*, *control*, and *catharsis*.

As a means of communication, joking provides a permissive and flexible context in which a grievance can be expressed, thus allowing for its rectification and the restoration of amity. As a means of control, the public nature of most joking serves to shame the object of the jocular offensive, to invoke social pressure for his conformity, and to elicit support for the complainant. As a means of catharsis, the joking expression of aggressive feelings reduces frustration and thus serves indirectly to perpetuate the amicable aspect of the relationship in which it occurs.

Joking also gives pleasure. The feeling of triumphant release that follows the successful—and safe—expression of hostile sentiments probably functions to reinforce reliance on joking as an adjustive mechanism. And the intrinsic pleasure of wit may also explain the persistence of joking behavior in the absence of an immediate "structural need" for it.

A more detailed description of one of the relationships already mentioned—sibling-in-law joking—will serve to illustrate these several points. Because of its relation to the pivotal institution of marriage, sibling-in-law joking is perhaps the most frequently used adjustive mechanism in Mossi social structure. The potential for marital conflict is high. This appears to be due to the combined factors of a sexually differentiated enculturative experience that results in marked dissimilarities in adult male and female personality; to an age difference between husbands and wives of at least ten years; to the classic stresses of polygyny; to the subordinate status of Mossi women, particularly of junior wives within their husband's patriclan; and to the possible dissatisfaction of a woman's parents, particularly her mother, at the loss of their daughter's services or at the inadequacy of bride-wealth payments.

Whatever its origins in a specific instance, it is important that this potential for conflict be controlled, for each marriage extends the network of affinal and cognatic ties that link the patrilineage to the larger community. Given a persistent potential for strife, the preservation of marital stability requires the provision of a means for minimizing its deleterious effects. When conflict occurs, the resultant frustration must be reduced, and accord must be reestablished in a manner that does no serious damage either to the marriage itself or to the larger context of social relations in which it is embedded. Sibling-in-law joking helps to accomplish this.

If, for example, a Mossi is irritated by his wife's performance of some aspect of her duties in the household or the field, he need not address her directly in order to communicate his dissatisfaction and release the tension he feels. To do so in a culture which places a high value on indirection in emo-

11: Skinner E-5 (1955-1957) 1964
FA28 Mossi FA28

[P. 13]

II

SOVEREIGNTY, KINSHIP, AND COMMUNITY

The Mossi restricted all important positions within the traditional political organization to persons who claimed lineal descent from Ouedraogo and Oubri, the ancient founders of the Mossi nation. Thus all the *Mogho Naamse, Dimdamba, Kombemba,* and *Tense Naaamse*—the heads of kingdoms, principalities, districts, and villages, respectively—claimed descent in the royal line. The bond of kinship among all important Mossi rulers was symbolized by membership in the lion clan (*Gegema*) and affiliated clans or *boodoo* founded by ancient members of the ruling families. Although the Mossi respected clan totems, they did not stress clan organization. They were more interested in membership in the segmentary lineages within the clans.[1] Yet not all Mossi groups stressed lineage affiliation. This was of supreme importance only for nobles whose membership in particular segments of ruling lineages gave them access to the *nam*—the power first possessed by the ancient founders, which is described by the Mossi as "that force of God which enables one man to control another." So important was the corporate possession of the nam by a ruling lineage that with few exceptions, membership in such a lineage gave a Moaga noble status.[2] Lineage segmentation gave some segments easier access to the nam, however, and resulting conflicts over sovereignty gave rise to the various Mossi kingdoms, principalities, and even districts.

Every Mossi ruling line attempted to legitimize its position by claiming the most direct descent from Ouedraogo and Oubri. The descendants of the founder of a local ruling lineage would claim that he had been an elder son deprived of his patrimony by unscrupulous younger brothers, or an elder son disqualified by a physical handicap from receiving the nam. Some ruling lineages even claimed that their founders had been elder sons who had voluntarily forsaken the problems of government and established new districts for themselves. Whenever tradition recounted that a younger son had indeed founded a kingdom or district, it was invariably said that he

11: Skinner E-5 (1955-1957) 1964-
FA28 Mossi FA28

had done so with full permission of his father and in place of an unadventurous elder brother.

For example, the ruling family of the Boulsa province claimed that its ancestor, Naba Namende, was the eldest son of Mogho Naba Oubri and chose to become his father's *Kourita* (a young son of a deceased Mogho Naba chosen as his father's personal representative on earth) and go into exile rather than subject his younger brother to the ordeal. At the same time, Namende sought to retain royal power equal to that of his brother, the new Mogho Naba, by taking Oubri's royal amulets with him.[8]

Mane province, too, was founded by one Nyaseme, a son of Koudoumie, who felt that he should have been given the nam. When routed in battle by his elder brother Kouda, he moved into the region of Mane, where he defeated the indigenous Ninisi and ruled over them. The princes who broke away from Ouagadougou during Koudoumie's reign considered themselves theoretically equal to the supreme ruler. Thus, they took the title of Dim. By so doing, they dramatized their claim to equality of status, if not of power, with the Mogho Naba, and their determination to "submit only to God."[9]

The Mossi insist that the relationship between the Mogho Naba and the Dimdamba was similar to that between father and sons, since the Dimdamba were "really the sons of the Mogho Naba" and are said to have acted as such. This analogy is interesting in view of the Mossi traditional pattern of avoidance—combined with love and tolerance—between fathers and elder sons.[5] The Dimdamba were often allowed to act at variance with the Mogho Naba. Some of them shifted allegiance from kingdom to kingdom; others usurped the power of the Mogho Naba over smaller districts, or claimed that they had been given this power; and most of them regulated their own affairs with little interference from their sovereign. He, as "father," interfered on occasion in their internal affairs, demanding help from them and often chastising them if they failed to comply.

The Mogho Naba and the Dimdamba often appointed their younger sons or brothers as rulers (Kombemba) of the districts that made up their kingdoms and principalities. In this way, power and authority were kept within the royal clan and its lineages. Nevertheless, in keeping with the concept of corporate access to the nam, the rulers of these dependencies had traditions that served to reconcile their claims to kingly or princely status with their actual subordinate position. District founders, too, were often portrayed as eldest sons who had been cheated out of their patrimony or had voluntarily left it to establish new districts. In some cases, the legendary heroes were granted miraculous births as well.

11: Skinner E-5 (1955-1957) 1964
FA28 Mossi FA28

tured slaves, whom he settled behind his compound and in separate villages under their own chiefs. He also welcomed refugees from wars in other territories and established them in special villages under their own chiefs.

The Dimdamba followed a similar practice in establishing power and control. According to Cheron, when Mogho Naba Koudoumie sent his son Tiraongo to conquer the Ninisi of Boussouma, the Ninisi defended themselves fiercely. Tiraongo's advance was thus very slow until he found a Ninisi named Wine, dressed in a panther's skin and hiding in a hole, "who on the promise that his life would be saved, consented to serve as guide to Tiraongo and to make propitiatory sacrifices to the divinities of the country. Thanks to him, the Mossi were able to progress to Somtongande."[6] Boulsa tradition recounts that when Naba Namende left Ouagadougou as the Kourita of Mogho Naba Oubri and took possession of their province, he placed his sons at the head of the principal villages "in order to control it [Boulsa] better."[7] One son was even sent to rule over a village at the request of the local Tengsoba.

The villages that made up a Mossi district were usually ruled by chiefs who belonged to sub-lineages of the local ruling lineage. These village chiefs and the members of their lineage formed a noble class, the *nakomce* ("children of the Naba"). As long as a lineage held the nam of a district, all of its sub-lineages had all the privileges of the noble class, regardless of whether they had charge of villages. But if the Mogho Naba deprived a ruling lineage of the nam by deposing the district chief, all its members were reduced to commoner status. Such people still traced their descent from the Mogho Naba who was the ancestor of their lineage founder, but this relationship ceased to be important unless the lineage recovered the nam of the district. If it did not, the former ruling lineage officially lost its ancient link with the royal clan within a few generations and became a nondescript local group.

The place of a deposed royal lineage was usually taken by the relatives of the nobles who subsequently acquired the nam of the district. These newcomers were genealogically closer to the ruling Mogho Naba, and formed the new nakomce of the district. The new district chief sometimes sent his sons to rule over the villages under his command. But if the village chiefs did not suffer the same fate as their lineage head at the hands of the Mogho Naba, the new district chief often permitted them to retain their posts. Thus they retained possession of the nam but lost their noble status. They served the new district chief in a political sense much as the Tengsoba served him in a ritual sense.

The plight of deposed district nakomce shows quite clearly the distinc-

power and authority were inherited by their families in the same manner as among Mossi lineages.

The last important category of Mossi chiefs included men who ruled over slave and serf villages. These men were themselves the descendants of slaves and serfs, for no free-born Mossi were placed in such posts. Needless to say, these chiefs were never lineally or collaterally related to the district chiefs, and therefore were never nobles. However, they might be affinally related to district chiefs, and in such cases the relationship was often of some political value.

It must be emphasized that once a man was made chief, he was respected, if not honored, by all the people of the district. In some districts, the Dapore Naba and the Baglere Naba, chiefs of two categories of serfs, were among the most valued assistants of the Kombere Naba. The only people who sometimes refused to honor the village chiefs were the nakomse, who were the holders of the district nam. Nevertheless, they were censored by the Kombere if they were disrespectful to his subordinates. No district chief could allow his government to be jeopardized by the maltreatment of persons who served it. In any conflict between the nam and the kin group, the supremacy of the nam was always maintained.

Every Mossi ruler, whether he held the nam of a kingdom, principality, district, or village, was *ipso facto* also *Boodkasma* (literally, "family head") of the local segment of his boodoo. The word boodoo refers to patrilineal groups that anthropologists would normally call clans, maximal lineages, major lineages, or minor lineages. The Mossi do not make any terminological distinction between these levels of their segmentary lineage system. Nevertheless, they recognize and use the status differences between these units to limit the access of each unit to the corporate assets of the boodoo. Their major social distinction is drawn between the minor lineage, which is also called boodoo, and its component minimal lineages. Each minimal-lineage unit is called a *babissi* (literally, "father's brother"), and is really a large extended family composed of relatives who had a common ancestor, three, four, or at most five generations ago.

The Mogho Naba, for example, was head of his babissi as well as ex officio head of the entire royal clan. Those rulers who claimed equality with him claimed that they, not he, were the true heads of the royal clan and the "direct" descendants of Ouedraogo and Oubri. As a function of their political position, the many princes and district chiefs were heads of their own babissi and of the maximal lineage to which their babissi belonged. Like the Mogho Naba, they were the ex officio heads of all members of their boodoo who lived in their territory and who claimed descent from the same royal ancestors,

11: Skinner E-5 (1955-1957) 1964
FA28 Mossi FA28

the same royal ancestors. A Mossi village chief was likewise the head of his babissi and ex officio head of all the other babissi in his village that belonged to his boodoo. As the official Boodkasma of his village's ruling lineage, the village chief held junior or senior status in relation to other village chiefs of the same boodoo who were also the Boodkasemdamba of their respective lineage segments.

Possession of the nam influenced the pattern of seniority within lineages and lineage segments. In most cases, seniority was based on age and generation. Thus, the oldest man of the oldest generation was the Boodkasma, and his office devolved upon the next oldest man when he died. But within the ruling lineages and their segments, the man who held the nam, whether young or old, was automatically senior to all others. This does not mean that these ruling lineages did not recognize age and generational seniority. For example, whenever a chief died and sovereignty returned to the lineage as a corporate group, the senior noble of the senior generation became the acting Boodkasma and lineage head. Like all Boodkasemdamba, he managed the affairs of his group, but only until a new chief was elected. The new Boodkasma, however, sometimes delegated some of his social rights and ritual obligations to this elder, who was often regarded as the unofficial or semi-official Boodkasma of his lineage. Similarly, the senior nobles of all segments of the ruling lineage were also regarded as Boodkasemdamba. Because they were so regarded and because of the role they played, these men seldom came into conflict with the district chief. He gave them a certain amount of leeway in dealing with the everyday affairs of their group. It was understood by all, however, that nothing should jeopardize the most important asset of the lineage—the nam. Therefore, the chief was obeyed in all important matters involving the noble lineage of the district. In such matters he listened to no one; for, as one district chief said, "Once I have received the nam from the Mogho Naba, no man in this district stands above me!"

This dominance of political relations over social relations was made clear by the behavior of commoners toward ruling nobles on the one hand, and of nobles among themselves on the other. Commoners showed greater respect and deference toward members of the ruling babissi than toward persons belonging to other noble babissi. Thus, they were more respectful to the district chief's father's brothers, his siblings, and his children than to his more distant relatives. Within the noble lineage itself, everyone had to respect the chief as the holder of the nam, but otherwise the generational principle of respect and deference was maintained. The eldest nobleman of the eldest generation received deference from all others (excluding the

11: Skinner E-5 (1955-1957) 1964
FA28 Mossi FA28

chief), and the hierarchy of respect descended to the youngest nobleman of the youngest generation. Very often, the full-grown son and presumed heir of the district chief had to kneel in respect to a distantly related younger man of an elder generation. Of course, this deference ceased if and when he became chief. If he did not receive the nam, he continued to show deference to all his lineage elders. This distinction between nam and boodoo was a source of potential conflict within the ruling lineages. The people usually accepted the implications of both principles, but when they did not, there were dynastic quarrels and territorial secessions.

The age and generational principles also operated within non-noble ruling lineages, but here too they were often complicated by the possession of the nam. Those village chiefs who had lost their noble status but retained the nam acted as official Boodkasemdamba of their local lineage segments and had considerable influence over their lineage although they did not control all its segments. Each lineage segment had its own Boodkasma, who normally ran its affairs. But because of the importance of the nam in Mossi life, the Boodkasemdamba deferred to the village chief in important matters pertaining to their own boodoo. However, the generational principle was followed within the local boodoo. Almost no one deferred to the children of the village chief, who, after all, were not nakomce.

The situation within commoner lineages that did not hold the nam was quite different. The age and generational principles obtained within the lineage segments of these boodoo, but never *across* the segments, as they did across the babissi. These segments were more autonomous. Each had its own Boodkasma, who looked after it without deferring to anyone. This autonomy was all the more pronounced since the segments of non-noble lineages tended to be scattered throughout a district. They interacted socially and politically only when they were physically close. In any case, in the absence of the nam, the segments of non-noble lineages had no reason to remain together; they tended to lose their hierarchical quality and to become equal and separate.

As would be expected in such circumstances, not all Mossi lineages paid the same attention to their genealogies. Noble lineages kept track of their actual or putative ancestors, whereas non-noble lineages tended to ignore them and to let geographical proximity determine meaningful kinship ties. This loss of interest in exact genealogies was found even among lineages that had lost the nam of a district and with it their nobility, but still retained the nam of a village. Members of the minimal units in such lineages competed actively for the village nam and were interested in fairly recent an-

11: Skinner E-5 (1955-1957) 1964
FA28 Mossi FA28

613 ● 173 778

cestors. They did not remember how they were related unless they happened to have a common grandfather or great-grandfather who had held the nam. The differential value thus placed on genealogies by the noble and non-noble lineages was due in most cases to the differential access of these lineages to the strategic resources of Mossi society. People who held the nam and belonged to noble lineages enjoyed special claims to goods and services. Those whose lineages did not hold the nam had no such privileges. [554]

613 554

Because Mossi society was basically patrilineal, a man shared in the status and the corporate assets of his patrilineage. Conversely, a man had no access to the status or resources of his mother's patrilineage except for some ritual rights and duties that accrued to him as a *yagenga* (a sister's or daughter's son). These rights and duties included residence in the home of a maternal patrilineage during childhood, attendance at sacrifices to the mother's patrilineal ancestors, the settling of quarrels between maternal kinsmen, and ritual license to seize specific items of property from these relatives. This license dramatized the *lack* of access rather than *freedom* of access to the property of maternal relatives. [591]

613 778 602 554 [195]

When a man's maternal relatives controlled the nam of the territory in which he lived, he could improve his social and economic position. In many cases, a young man who had gone to live as a "stranger" with a noble uncle or grandfather remained with these relatives. His privilege to remain was sanctioned by the Mossi belief that a boy's maternal ancestors would wreak vengeance on any person who tried to evict him from the village from which his mother had been "sent into the bush" (given away as a wife). By using various strategies and subterfuges, the "stranger" obtained wives through his maternal relatives and used their land and other resources. After several generations the lineal descendants of the "stranger" frequently became indistinguishable from their maternal relatives, although such cases were not often formally acknowledged. Whether these "sisters' children" ever managed to obtain the nam of their mother's patrilineage is a moot point, because in theory they could not. Yet, also by Mossi definition, a man could never inherit rights and duties in his mother's patrilineage; however, it is known that this did happen. It is possible that the close check kept by the ruling lineage on its genealogy made usurpation impossible. Yet I know of several cases in which candidates for chiefship feared competition from men whose descent actually barred them from the nam.

The son of a nobleman and a commoner woman seldom attached himself permanently to his maternal patrilineage, although he retained all of his customary rights, privileges, and duties in it. Occasionally, noblemen did attach themselves to their maternal relatives, but those who did had

11: Skinner E-5 (1955-1957) 1964
FA28 Mossi FA28

usually been banished from their patrilineage for some illegal act or had voluntarily left home after a dispute over inheritance of the nam, goods, or women.

The fact that noble lineages often absorbed sisters' sons was only one of the reasons why such lineages survived and expanded, even if only at the expense of other lineages within the local society. Another reason for this growth was that the nobles, possessing the nam and its prerogatives, received more wives than the commoners. They had more children and thus multiplied more rapidly. Mossi lineages were generally exogamous through their whole depth, but exogamy became increasingly mandatory as the segments became smaller. Marriage within a maximal lineage was permitted only when some of its members had moved so far away from its original locality that the original ties were either forgotten or ignored. The Mossi have myths in which the lineage founder gives his overly numerous descendants permission to marry certain of their relatives. Even so, if a marriage was actually found to have occurred between distant relatives, appropriate sacrifices had to be made to the ancestors.

Marriage was also forbidden between persons who could trace a common maternal ancestor. But because the time depth here was very shallow, total bilateral exogamy was practiced to a depth of only four or five generations. Of course, the differential concern with genealogies between those who had access to the nam and those who did not, had an effect on the extent to which exogamy was practiced.

Most Mossi marriages were based on an exchange of women between two lineages linked by a long-term series of reciprocal exchanges of goods and services. Women were regarded as the most valuable part of this system. In theory, only the Boodkasma of a babissi had the right to give a woman as a wife to another lineage. However, the initiators of the reciprocal relations between lineage segments were often babissi heads, Yirisobadamba (heads of nuclear families), or individual lineage members. When a man from one lineage "made friends" with a member of another and rendered him a service or received a favor from him, their respective lineages were considered to be involved. The corporate nature of the lineage segment was acknowledged by all persons engaged in reciprocal relations, and the relations between two individuals were seen as relations between their lineages.

When a man wished to give a daughter to a friend as a wife, he had to consult his Boodkasma, who then gave the woman to the friend's Boodkasma. The latter accepted the woman as a wife for the lineage rather than for the man involved. The lineage retained its rights *in gene-*

11: Skinner E-5 (1955-1957) 1964
FA28 Mossi FA28

tricem over the woman and turned over the rights *in uxorem* to the man. This point is very important, because, by accepting the woman as a wife for his lineage segment, the Boodkasma accepted the responsibility of giving a woman in return to the other lineage. The stress placed on the lineage in wife-exchange was due to the corporate nature of this kinship group, as well as to the prohibition against a man's exchanging his own sisters or daughters as wives. He had to use other women in the lineage. It was believed that if this rule were violated, the women exchanged would also "exchange lives"—i.e., the fate of one would automatically reflect the fate of the other.

The Mossi marriage system worked to the advantage of both the elder males of the lineage segment and the nobles of the ruling lineage. Since the older men of the various groups controlled the resources of their kinsmen, they usually initiated "friendship" relations and obtained wives for their group. The more impartial elders distributed the women equitably among their fellow kinsmen, but occasionally older men kept the wives for themselves, knowing that in time these wives would be inherited by their younger kinsmen. Younger men had to wait until their elders died, do without wives, or establish "friendly" relations with older men. Some young men and newcomers to the district appealed to the chief for *pughsiudse* (from *pugho*, the diminutive of *pagha*, "woman," and *siubo*, "to give with the hope of profitable return"). These pughsiudse were women whom the chief received from his subjects and whom he subsequently gave out as wives on condition that their husbands give him their eldest daughters as future pughsiudse.[9]

The nobility benefited by the Mossi marriage system because, as a group, they received more women than they gave out in the exchange of wives. Furthermore, this enabled them to make more marriage arrangements. This does not mean that a differential value was placed on women of different status groups. The Mossi tended to regard all women as equally valuable, but commoners tended to be more generous to noble friends than vice versa.

The nobles also received wives from their "brother," the district chief. He received women as presents and signs of fealty and homage from most of the groups in his district, and also from groups outside his district. He kept some of these women as wives; others he used as pughsiudse; and still others he gave to his lineage segments. Some nobles had another method of obtaining wives, namely, by abduction. A nobleman who saw the daughter or wife of a commoner in the market place often encouraged her to desert her father or husband and come to him. Her relatives usually

11: Skinner E-5 (1955-1957) 1964
FA28 Mossi FA28

appealed to the district chief, and occasionally the woman was sent back. A nobleman set on having a certain girl as a wife usually had small bracelets like those worn by all noble wives placed on her ankles. Once this was done, the chief could not be compelled to send her back to her parents, and any man who tried to retrieve her was guilty of interfering with a nobleman's wife and could be killed for it. In fact, only the male relatives of noblemen's wives could converse with them without running the risk of being apprehended and executed.

The district was the most important unit in the Mossi principalities and kingdoms. It was on this level that the Mossi nobility came into direct contact with the various social and ethnic groups of the society. Here, kinship and affinal ties linked the conquerors and the conquered, the ancient and recent nobility, the refugees from conflicts over the nam and the resident aliens, in a network of social, ritual, economic, and political relationships. It was also on this level that myths and traditions legitimized most effectively the Mossi socio-economic and political system as well as the relationships between the various social and ethnic groups.

The number and size of the Mossi districts varied greatly from one principality or kingdom to another. Some districts were large and wealthy, with a number of large villages; smaller districts had a larger proportion of small villages and hamlets. The average number of these small units was probably between fifty and sixty-five per district. The population of the districts ranged from 10,000 to 35,000 persons. Some *tense* (villages) had as many as 5,000 inhabitants and some as few as 50. The average village had about 500 inhabitants. But regardless of size, all Mossi districts and component villages had basically the same structure and fulfilled the same functions. The structure of Nobere district is representative. Nobere covered approximately 200 square miles. It was bounded on the east by a district called Manga, on the north by the districts of Toece and Djiba, and on the west and south by the Red Volta River. A census taken in 1905, just nine years after the European conquest, showed the Nobere population to be about 13,200.[10] In 1955 approximately 10,000 persons inhabited 24 villages and hamlets scattered through the more inhabitable part of the district.

The number of villages and hamlets in Nobere district apparently fluctuated. Villages were occasionally abandoned, while small hamlets grew into prominent settlements. The people of Nobere always tried to establish their villages as close to the Red Volta as possible in order to utilize the more fertile lands. But they were repeatedly driven back by disease and

11: Skinner E-5 (1955-1957) 1964
FA28 Mossi FA28

known, however, whether this woman was Biligo's daughter or one of his pughsiudse. The people of Passintenga claimed descent from Biligo's daughter, but the other groups in the district questioned this ancestry. The village called Bourougna had two chiefs. One, the Tang Naba, was descended from a son of a Ouidi Naba of Ouagadougou who had settled in Nobere; the other, the Yang Naba, claimed descent from an aboriginal Ninisi man and woman of Biligo's lineage. The Yang Naba was thus another of Biligo's yagense in the district. The chief of Nimpwe village was a descendant of the aboriginal Ninisi people and was the principal Tengsoba in the district. He had more ritual power than political power, however. The nam of Basbedo village was held by a man descended from Busansi refugees. Living in this village was a man with the honorific title of Soulougre Naba, who claimed descent from the most important Ninisi family who had lived in the district prior to the arrival of Biligo.

Most of the nobles of the local ruling lineage lived either in the saghse of the district villages or in isolated hamlets. Local tradition holds that one of the conditions set by Naba Ngado for allowing Biligo's descendants to remain as village chiefs was the right to settle nineteen of his sons in many of the villages. He allegedly sent *mabissi* (sons of the same mother) to the same village. By so doing, he took advantage of the normal lines of fission that are created after the death of a Mossi father and prevented undue rivalries. Yet there was no driving necessity for him to do so, because there were more villages than chief's sons available. In fact, there are still many villages without nobles in Nobere district. The people of Passintenga, for instance, allegedly refused to have nobles live among them, while the people of Nimpwe allegedly killed by sorcery all the nobles who ever tried to live there. The actual reason for the absence of nobles in these villages may have been that the district chief did not wish to send his sons to villages into which his daughters had married or where there lived earth priests who were thought to be powerful sorcerers. Nobles were often unwelcome, feared, and resisted, because they tended to exploit the village people and to take advantage of the commoners.

The villages of Nobere district, like those of other Mossi districts, were populated in part by refugees and strangers. Several saghse in Togese village were inhabited by Mossi refugees who had fled a district called Guiergo after a fight over the nam of that district. Scattered throughout the district's villages were people of unknown origin called Siamse. The Siamse found in the villages of Tewaka and Nabadogo claimed that their ancestors had "followed" Naba Biligo when he came down from Ouagadougou to found the district. Several saghse in Bourougna village were in-

11: Skinner E-5 (1955-1957) 1964
FA28 Mossi FA28

habited by Yarse, people of Mandingo origin who had been assimilated by the Mossi. There were no Fulani in Nobere, even though some lived in nearby districts. But in Pinse village there lived people called Simili-Mossi, who claimed descent from Fulani herdsmen and Mossi women. Basbedo village was inhabited and ruled by people of Busansi origin. They claimed that their ancestors had fled from famine and other hardships in Busansi country and had been granted haven by Naba Biligo. The people who lived in the two saghse of Nab'tenga called Dapore (Dapobi) and Baglere (Bangare) were serfs of diverse non-Mossi origin. Saghse or compounds of Gurunsi slaves were found close to the dwellings of nobles and village chiefs throughout the district.

The number of saghse in the villages of Nobere district varied according to the size of the village and the pattern of nam inheritance within the major lineage segment that ruled the village. The saka itself housed a minor-lineage segment. The larger the village's minor lineage segment and the greater this group's genealogical depth, the more numerous were its component segments and thus its saghse. The proliferation of saghse and minor-lineage segments within the ruling lineage of a village was dependent primarily on possession of the nam. As soon as a man received the nam, he obtained control over a large amount of goods and services. He was then in a position to obtain many wives for himself and his immediate relatives, and as a result his minimal lineage grew rapidly. In time this group became so large that it split from its brother babissi within the saka, and formed a new saka of its own. Finally, this babissi became a minor lineage in its own saka, in segmental opposition to the other babissi and minor lineages within the other saghse. If the descendants of one man retained the nam for about three generations, their lineage segment and saka grew larger and in time cast off its own junior segments. However, if the segment lost the nam to a man of another babissi and saka, it ceased to proliferate. Some such groups even declined and disappeared by fusing with other local segments of the same lineage. Here is how the system worked in Barkago village of Nobere district.

Barkago itself was founded sometime in the dim past by a son of Naba Biligo. It had an area of eight or ten square miles and a population of about 650 when the French arrived in 1896. Its boundaries were set by such natural phenomena as clumps of trees, hills, and ravines. The village itself included five distinct saghse separated by footpaths, hills, rocks, and ravines, and an area of wasteland (*weogho*). Three of the saghse, Natenga ("chief's land"), Godin, and Kedpalago, were inhabited by the minor segments of the boodoo of Naba Biligo. Here is how this came about. After

the original segment of the ruling Biligo lineage had lived in Barkago for some time, it divided into two minor lineages and settled in two saghse, Natenga and Godin. A noble from Godin possessed the nam, but it eventually passed to a noble from Natenga. The new chief then founded a new saka called Kedpalago because he wanted more living space for his own children. As a result, the minor lineage of Natenga now had two babissi living in two saghse. The minor lineage of Godin subsequently declined in size and prestige. The only evidence of its former importance was that its eldest male continued to make separate sacrifices to his own chiefly ancestors, even though the more recent holders of the nam made sacrifices to all former chiefs. These independent sacrifices were made in spite of the fact that this minor lineage kept growing smaller because its male members left to live elsewhere or to join maternal patrilineages with higher status. The sacrifices were expected to cease only if and when the minor lineage were to disappear with the incorporation of the widows and orphans of its last surviving males into the other Biligo groups of the village and district. Of course, if the Godin minor lineage had regained the nam, it undoubtedly would have experienced a rebirth and renewal of strength. It might have attracted its daughter's sons, and even aliens who would have lived in its saghse as they did in those of the ruling lineage segments.

A fourth saka, Nakomgo ("we hunger after the nam"), was inhabited by the noble descendants of Naba Ngado, the district chief who had replaced the descendant of Naba Biligo of Nobere. Since these nobles traced their descent from two full brothers, Kouliga and Kongo, they formed two related minor lineages with five component minimal lineages. The compounds of the two babissi of the Kouliga minor lineage were separate but contiguous. Near them were the compounds of the three babissi of the Kongo minor lineage. Scattered about in the Nakomgo saka were compounds of sisters' sons, strangers, and nobles' slaves.

The people of Narila, the fifth saka of Barkago, were members of the aboriginal Ninisi population, and thus furnished the village's earth-priest. He made sacrifices to the earth shrines in the village, gave ritual permission for building compounds and digging graves, and took control of the village during the period between the death of a chief and the accession of another. Scattered throughout the various saghse were compounds inhabited by people of serf, slave, or refugee origin.

Of all the groups within the village, the Ngado people kept the most exact genealogies. They did so because one of the segments of their maximal lineage held the district nam, and as nobles they had theoretical access to it. Once they had lost the nam of the district, the descendants of Biligo

11: Skinner E-5 (1955-1957) 1964
FA28 Mossi FA28

 621

also lost much of their interest in preserving their genealogies. Their local 613
lineage segment, which controlled the village nam, still showed interest in 798
its genealogy, but the people of Godin did not quite remember how they were related to the ruling lineage segment. Several times in the recent history of Barkago (and other villages), the men who were given the village nam had to be recalled from distant villages where they were living with maternal patrilineages. So relatively unimportant was possession of the village nam without concomitant noble status that after Naba Ngado took over, the local Biligo people began to ignore all local genealogical records except descent from Biligo. The Ninisi people had the least reason to be interested in their genealogy, and they simply ignored it. They had been separated from the other Ninisi groups in the district for so long that they did not even forbid marriage into those groups.

In villages such as Barkago, the existence of several lineage groupings 613
and families of strangers facilitated local marriages. But in villages with 621
fewer lineage groups, the time came when all groups were so closely linked by marriage and affinal alliances that for all practical purposes the village became an exogamous unit. By 1956, this process had reached such an advanced stage in Barkago that hardly any marriages took place between the Ninisi and Biligo local lineage segments. Both groups were permitted to marry the local descendants of Ngado, because the latter were more recent arrivals in the village. These marriages were of great significance to all villagers because they linked the nobles and the commoners in a series of exchanges. Moreover, because the groups were linked through sisters' sons [565]
with special privileges in both groups, problems deriving from status dif- [606]
ferences were more easily solved. Even the most arrogant noble was often [607]
constrained by ancestral sanctions to maintain amicable relations with his in-laws.

The Biligo lineage of Barkago contracted marriages with the other, non-related groups within and without the district. The Ngado people did likewise. Whether these nobles were able to marry noble women of other districts is a moot point. Owing to distance and politics, no such marriages are known to have occurred, and no one seems to know whether they were permissible. The Ninisi, who had always been commoners, had the largest marriage circle of all the village groups. They were able to marry nobles, commoners, and the Ninisi of the district and other districts.

The inhabitants of a Mossi village built their houses and cultivated their 423
crops on land the village chief had granted to their respective lineages. 613
Since the royal lineage, by right of conquest, controlled all of Mossi country, the rights of usufruct of a lineage depended ultimately on the Mogho [643]

11: Skinner E-5 (1955-1957) 1964
FA28 Mossi FA28

613 [643]

Naba. This did not mean, however, that either the Mogho Naba or any of his chiefs owned the land of Mossi country. The Mossi chiefs and their ruling lineage controlled the Mossi people and thus were able to decide who should use the land. However, there is no evidence that Mossi chiefs ever thought of controlling people by controlling land. The land appears to have been a public good, the utilization of which was in the rulers' interests. Rulers tried to attract more people, but they hardly ever tried to get more land. The people within a Mossi community who might have been said to "own" the land were the Ninisi, whose rights were derived from first occupancy and from their special association with the soil in which their ancestors were buried. When they were conquered, they did not lose their "ritual" rights over the land of their communities, but they were persuaded or forced to "care for" them in the name of the ruling group.

11: Skinner E-5 (1955-1957) 1964
FA28 Mossi FA28

000 went to Djiba when his grandfather died and his father was installed as Mogho Naba.

The origin of Djiba's status as the seat of the Crown Prince is rather 634 obscure. The people of the neighboring district of Nobere say that Djiba 644 was founded by a "companion" of their own founder, Naba Biligo, one of 173 the numerous "eldest" sons of Mogho Naba Oubri, the implication being that Djiba was supervised by Nobere. However, no one seems to know when Djiba's status changed or what happened to the ancient family who used to govern it. The consensus is that in earlier times the heir presumptive to Ouagadougou did not necessarily become chief of Djiba, but was given any district whose chieftainship was vacant when he came of age. Dim [114] Delobson reports that Djiba became the district of the Crown Prince sometime during the seventeenth century, when Mogho Naba Zombere, who had reigned for sixty years, found it necessary to establish a permanent seat for his heir.[28] However, Dim Delobson does not report under what conditions Djiba was chosen, nor does he say what happened to the local ruling lineage when this transfer took place. That the transfer was carried out in the manner reported by Dim Delobson is not doubted, because each new [558] Mogho Naba obtained districts for his relatives in this way. Through this process, the people of the ancient ruling lineages were usually reduced to ●[613] the level of commoners, and this is apparently what happened to the rulers of Djiba.

634 The first public sign that the young prince was being prepared for the 643 nam came in the form of a summons commanding him to go to Ouagadougou to be installed as Djiba Naba. On his way to the capital, he visited several villages where the local Tengsobadamba made sacrifices to the earth goddess in his name. He took this opportunity to meet with the district chiefs and their assembled village chiefs; he was entertained by them; and in turn he distributed gifts to the old women, whose praises were considered especially effective in bringing health and long life. When the boy finally arrived at the capital, he lodged at the compound of the Kambo Naba, head of the palace guard, until the Mogho Naba and his ministers installed him as chief of Djiba.

The installation rites for the Crown Prince were very similar to those already described for the Mogho Naba, and identical to those for the district chiefs. During the ceremony, no mention was made of the fact that the prince was the son of the Mogho Naba. The only special feature was that when the prince went into the courtyard after the ceremony to render homage to the Mogho Naba, he sat in an area assigned to him by custom. When the ruler appeared, the prince followed the Gounga Naba, who was pro-

11: Skinner E-5 (1955-1957) 1964
FA28 Mossi FA28

It was only when this man had returned to the capital that all the nobles in the local ruling lineage were invited to Ouagadougou to press their claims. Only the dead chief's babissi went to Ouagadougou, even though all nobles subscribed to the traditional concept that "the nam does not belong to any one sub-lineage; it can be given to any nobleman." Unlike the others, these nobles did not shave their heads in mourning, thus indicating their candidacy for the nam. When they donned sheepskin cloaks and carried spears on their shoulders, they indicated that they were interested in the nam of the district.

Before a candidate for the district chieftainship left for Ouagadougou, he collected livestock, money, clothing, and grain from his friends to give as gifts or bribes to important officials in the capital. When he arrived there, he lived with friends and conducted his campaign from their home. He and the other candidates visited their provincial minister and his colleagues, the Mogho Naba, and other courtiers, giving presents ostensibly as a sign of friendship but actually with the ultimate aim of impressing these people with their generosity. These activities were often very costly; for if the Ouagadougou officials suspected that the candidates were wealthy, they made every effort to obtain as many presents as possible. It was not unusual for candidates for the district chieftainship to remain at the capital as long as "thirty-three" or "sixty-six" days before the officials were satisfied with their generosity and made preparations for the election.

The evening before the election, the Baloum Naba asked each candidate to provide a chicken and a sheep for the evening sacrifices to the namtibo.[32] After the morning ceremony on the following day, the Ouidi Naba reminded the sovereign that a new chief had to be chosen for Nobere district. The Mogho Naba summoned the Gounga Naba and asked him which candidate had the best character and was most capable of taking care of the district—a question which shows that the Mossi never placed primogeniture above the ability to rule.[33] The Gounga Naba had already consulted his friends about the matter, but he recounted both the good and the bad qualities of each candidate. At the same time, he hinted which one would make the best chief. He finally told the Mogho Naba that all of the candidates were worthy men, adding, "You can give the nam to any of them." The Mogho Naba then looked around to ascertain whether the other ministers had concurred in the Gounga Naba's implied choice before declaring, "I will give the nam to X, because when his [father, grandfather, or brother, used in the generic or classificatory sense] was alive, he was good to me. The ancestors would be angry if I did not give his [son, grandson, or brother] the nam." With these words the selection was made, and the ministers now prepared to install the successful candidate.

greater number of lineage members eligible for the nam and the shallow genealogical depth. Every man who had the ability or desire to rule was encouraged to seek the post. Many candidates tried to impress the district chief and his advisers with their good qualities; most tried to bribe them. Since the candidates could not openly seek the post during the day, they visited the important officials of the district at night, taking money and cattle as presents. Some candidates even promised wives. The intrigues on this level, such as seeking the friendship of pages to find out about the activities of rivals, paralleled those at Ouagadougou. The more gifts a candidate gave the district chief, the more his rivals tried to surpass him. Consequently, the district chief often kept the office vacant for months or even as long as two or three years in order to enjoy these lucrative gifts. Neither the caretakers of the village, who complained about the administrative problems of a village without a chief, nor the Tengsobadamba, who declared that without the permission of a chief they could not make sacrifices to help the people avoid illness, drought, and sterility, could force the Kombere Naba to name a new village chief. Only when the candidates had exhausted most of their wealth was the process to elect the chief set in motion.

The district chief had a better knowledge of the character of candidates for the village chieftainship than the Dimdamba or Mogho Nanamse had about the men whom they selected. The district chiefs were better able than other Mossi rulers to obey the dictum that only those men capable of "keeping" the country should rule. Nevertheless, before making a choice, the Kombere Naba called in the local minister responsible for the village in question and discussed with him the character and capabilities of the various candidates.[42] As on higher levels, the eldest son of the former chief was usually favored, especially if he had sent a large *fado* (death tax) to the district chief and had been generous to him during the interregnum. But it was also possible that one of the dead chief's younger sons or one of his brothers or uncles might be chosen. In some cases, the district chiefs chose men from related sub-lineages that had not held the nam for generations. One district chief chose a man who had lived away from the village for thirty years. He had gone to live in his mother's brother's village as a young man and did not return until he was named chief. Admittedly, such cases were exceptional, but they kept alive in the minds of the local people the concept of the Mossi lineage's corporate possession of the nam.

On the day chosen for the election of a village chief, all the candidates with their unshaved heads and sheepskin mantles reported to the village administrator's house along with all the other men of their lineage. They gave him presents, and he led them to the compound of the district chief.

11: Skinner E-5 (1955-1957) 1964
FA28 Mossi FA28

longing to other provinces. Provinces also differed with respect to the number of districts they included and the nature and size of these districts. Some provinces were larger than others; some were wealthier; and some were more difficult to administer.

Each province was administered by a governor, who also functioned as an important minister at the court of Ouagadougou. In the order of their importance, these governors were the Ouidi Naba, the Larhalle Naba, the Gounga Naba, the Baloum Naba, and the Kamsaogho Naba. Smaller administrative units (both districts and villages) were under the direct control of the Mogho Naba himself, or under the supervision of his relatives or lesser officials. None of the governors were nobles or descendants of Ouedraogo and Oubri, but their positions were hereditary. According to one tradition, the first provincial administrators were personal slaves of the early Mossi rulers who were given the task of supervising the activities of district chiefs of noble status. Another, more romantic tradition is that the man who became the first governor or Gounga Naba was a companion of Mogho Naba Oubri during the conquest of Ouagadougou. Later, the Gounga Naba presented one of his friends to Oubri with the request that the man take precedence over him, be made chief governor, and be given the title of Ouidi Naba. Oubri allegedly acceded to this request, and later granted another request of the Gounga Naba that a friend of the Ouidi Naba be named Larhalle Naba and be made the second governor. The Gounga Naba told the Mogho Naba that he preferred to see his friends happy and that he was content to be third minister. This tradition does not state when or how the Baloum Naba and the Kamsaogho Naba were named governors.[21]

With the exception of the Kamsaogho Naba, who was a eunuch and had no heirs, the provincial governors headed administrative lineages. These lineages provided administrators not only for Ouagadougou but also for the principalities and districts. Cheron states that the Ouidi Naba of Boulsa was "a descendant of the Ouidi Naba of Ouagadougou, a great dignitary who rules a province and sits among the electors of the Mogho Naba."[22] Many administrative lineages on the district level were descended from officials sent down by the Mogho Naba with a new district chief in lieu of one deposed. When a chief was deposed, his administrators, like his relatives, lost their importance and their ties to Ouagadougou.

The Ouidi Naba, called *Moss' ba* ("father of the Mossi") and *Sida soba* ("master of the truth"), was the principal administrator and the prime minister. His titles undoubtedly sprang from his important role in the election of the Mogho Naba and from his position as caretaker of the king-

had a group of confidants who acted as an informal council. These men included senior members of his own lineage, elders from other local lineages, and personal friends. Again, like the confidants of the district chiefs, these men visited the village chief whenever they were not busy with their own affairs to talk to him about wives, crops, and village matters. Although protocol was at a minimum on this level, the chief had to maintain a high degree of decorum. As a member of the ruling lineage of the district, he had noble status and had to be treated accordingly. The non-noble village chief was also respected as a recipient of the nam. But all chiefs, whether nobles or commoners, were expected to lead exemplary lives lest the flaws in their characters as revealed by the intimacy of village life should weaken their prestige.

The village chief received his orders from the district chief through the administrator in charge of his village or through one of this official's servants. He, in turn, used his own sons or relatives to transmit messages to the heads of the saghse. If the message was extremely important, the village chief's messenger might be accompanied by the administrator's messenger or by the district chief's personal representatives. The saksobadamba then transmitted the order to the various compound heads. This hierarchy was always followed because, by following it, the officials knew who was responsible for disobeying or frustrating the wishes of the superior chiefs. As on the district level, the orders transmitted to the village and its sections dealt with such things as collecting tribute, picking fruits from the district chief's trees, allocating labor for the district chief or his personal retainers, transferring or summoning cases to the district court, procuring sacrificial animals for the local Tengsoba, and requesting soldiers. The village chief also sent his own messages to the saghse. These messages, however, dealt with such village matters as local sacrifices, quarrels, and court cases.

Misrule and maladministration by a village chief were punished either by the district chief or by the villagers. Like other Mossi rulers, the village chief could not be deposed and allowed to live. However, he had a better chance of fleeing and finding refuge in another district. His presence in a strange district did not challenge the authority of the local chief, and he had no opportunities to seize any of his host's villages. In fact, if the refugee was accompanied by a large number of his subjects, his host might even give him land on which to erect a new village. The proviso was, of course, that he should not "spoil" the district by causing trouble. If a village chief accused of maladministration was seized by the district chief before he could flee, he was invariably executed. If he was a commoner, he was decapitated or even stoned to death; if he was a nobleman, he was taken into the bush and strangled in secret by the district police.

11: Skinner E-5 (1955-1957) 1964
FA28 Mossi FA28

and strangled in secret by the district police. If a district chief hesitated to punish a village chief whose followers had complained, the aggrieved lineage or the entire village simply took its movable property and left. This sanction does not seem to have been applied often, but its threat was normally sufficient to curb the excesses of the worst village chief.

622
687
634
[613]
[626]

11: Skinner E-5 (1955-1957) 1964
FA28 Mossi FA28

[P.78]

V

LAW AND THE JUDICIAL PROCESS

671 The Mossi possessed a comprehensive body of rules governing human conduct. These rules were well known to the people, and violators were punished by the responsible authorities. The Mossi might be said to have had substantive law, but they had no written codes. Nevertheless, the lack of written codes does not warrant Mangin's blanket criticism of Mossi judicial processes: "Of course, there was no written code, no formal scale of penalties. Everything depended on custom and on the whim of the judge. [662] Thus, the wealthy could obtain sentences in their favor by paying the judges, and thieves could avoid punishment by sharing their loot with the Naba."[1] Custom did dictate the penalties, just as "written custom" dictates penalties [692] in all written legal codes. But, as we shall see, the Mossi did have a known [695] scale of penalties. Moreover, a Mossi judge had to be careful in rendering judgment, because his decisions could be reviewed by a higher court.

596 681 The head of the Mossi extended family, the *Yirisoba,* was responsible for the everyday conduct of his charges. It was his duty to settle all family quarrels, and to punish persons guilty of theft within the compound, disrespect toward elders, and incest. Punishment for the lesser wrongs included 596 683 684 reprimands and floggings. A person found guilty of disrespect to the elders or of incest could be banished from the group. But banishment was so severe that it was imposed only if the criminal refused to make the usual conciliatory gestures and was condemned by all the members of his boodoo. Even after this condemnation, however, he could ask a "sister's son," a yagenga, [613] to intercede for him. This man, the son of a female lineage member, had many privileges within his mother's brother's lineage, including the right to mediate between an exile and his boodoo.

593 586 613 Amicable relations within the family group were most often disrupted by conjugal difficulties. A Mossi husband could occasionally flog an erring wife, but he was not allowed to maltreat her. When a man became disgusted with his wife and wished to repudiate her, he put her water pots in the compound yard. This rather serious action often led to hostile relations

11: Skinner E-5 (1955-1957) 1964
FA28 Mossi FA28

between the lineages concerned. If either the repudiated woman or a member of her husband's lineage wished to initiate a reconciliation, she or he had to summon a yagenga. He alone was permitted to reconcile the couple after the pots had been placed in the courtyard. When a woman felt that she was being maltreated by her husband, she usually fled to her own patrilineage and waited for her husband's patrilineage—usually his brothers—to visit her male relatives and discuss the case. If the woman was judged guilty, she was reprimanded and sometimes flogged by her own relatives for causing trouble between the two lineages, and then sent home to her husband. However, if the man was found guilty, his wife was returned to him, but he was warned that he would forfeit all rights to her if he maltreated her again. A man who lost his wife through repeated maltreatment could not take the matter to court, because chiefs usually refused to deal with purely domestic issues. His only recourse was to induce one of his lineage brothers to recall a daughter who had married into his wife's lineage. This act was usually sufficient to bring about the reconciliation of the estranged couple before innocent persons were hurt.

The Mossi made every effort to solve minor problems without recourse to the chiefs. The local Boodkasemdamba and lineage elders adjudicated quarrels and simple offenses involving members of minimal segments in the various village saghse. They even tried to resolve difficulties between lineage members of larger segments who lived in different villages. The elders often imposed punishments such as reprimands, floggings, and even banishment. The convicted person did not usually appeal to the chief, because he knew that the chief would advise him to settle his problem within the family.

Unrelated villagers also tried to settle difficulties among themselves without appealing to the chief. For example, a man who was caught stealing could be beaten or even killed by his intended victims, and the chief did not punish them for their action. In many cases, villagers simply took the thief back to his relatives, knowing they would punish him. Occasionally, a family disgraced by a thieving member forced him to kill himself. When this happened the chief held an inquest but took no other action.

The Mossi gave a fairly simple explanation for returning a thief to his relatives for punishment. They said that every family had "weak" members, and that by not harming the captured thief they were only protecting themselves against retaliation if one of their own relatives should commit a similar crime. But a more important reason seems to have been their fear of starting a feud that might result in the premeditated murder of a man and the subsequent execution of his murderer.

The one crime that invoked terrible unofficial sanctions was rape. If the

11: Skinner E-5 (1955-1957) 1964
FA28 Mossi FA28

offender was caught in the act, he was immediately killed. If he was merely suspected of guilt both by his own lineage and by the lineage of the wronged woman, he was banished from his lineage and from the village. So swift and sure was this punishment that a rapist always fled if he believed he would be discovered. The Mossi considered rape such a heinous crime that if the act resulted in pregnancy, an abortion was attempted; if this failed, the child was killed at birth. Furthermore, the rapist could never hope to return to his community, because even if the yagenga appealed on his behalf and his lineage forgave him, the community ban still stood.[8]

The village chief was usually aware of the torts and crimes that occurred in his village, and of how the families concerned had handled them. He seldom interfered in the internal affairs of a lineage, or in problems between lineages, unless he felt that a case was beyond their legal competence. In the case of a rapist's expulsion, community feeling usually ran so high that if the chief intervened, it was only to support the will of the community. However, when people could not settle their differences peaceably or when a major crime was committed within a village, the chief usually summoned the offender to his court for trial. His right to do so was sanctioned by his possession of the nam, but the very concept of the nam often made his task difficult. If he was a commoner, the nobles often emphasized their relationship to the holder of the royal nam, the district chief, and objected to being tried by a commoner. They usually appeared at the village court if summoned, but often attempted afterward to find some excuse for taking their case to the district chief. They felt that their local reputation would prevent them from receiving a fair hearing from anyone but their lineage brother. Furthermore, if they were judged and convicted in the lower court and the verdict was confirmed in the district court, they felt that the district chief, in concurring with the village chief, had broken the solidarity of their lineage. But if they took their case directly to the district chief, they knew they were being judged by an equal or a superior, and that an unfavorable judgment would not damage their status.

The competence of the village chief to deal with court cases was limited.[9] He did pass on all the legal infractions that occurred in his village, but he tried to adjudicate only the minor cases. Thus, he tried cases involving theft, quarrels, trespassing, adultery, indebtedness, and abuse, and tried to settle them by reprimanding the guilty ones. He sent cases involving serious injury and homicide to the district court, along with cases he was unable to resolve.

The district court was a most efficient and effective judicial organ, and the nature of the Mossi judicial process was most evident on this level. The

11: Skinner E-5 (1955-1957) 1964
FA28 Mossi FA28

district court did not deal with all cases referred to it. Many cases, especially those concerning the behavior of women, were referred back to the village to be resolved by the respective lineages. The district chief considered it beneath his dignity to deal with such cases, and his guards ostentatiously chased away the litigants. He consented to try such cases only when he suspected that more serious trouble would develop if he did not. Theoretically, district courts could not try cases involving the death penalty, but in practice most of them did. Higher chiefs tolerated this as long as district chiefs did not abuse their usurpation of power.[4]

When a major crime was committed in a district, the case was usually sent immediately to the district court. The chief of the village where the crime had been committed sent one of his relatives with the accused or with the litigants to the district chief's compound, and dispatched another relative to notify the village administrator. The administrator either went to the district court to await the litigants, or sent his representative to meet the court-bound party on the way and question them about the case. Such parties were often very large, because the Mossi believed that a man should not go to court alone. They felt that the criminal act of a relative reflected on all of them, and that it was important for them to appear with him. To quote a Mossi proverb, "A chicken without its feathers is a very small bird indeed." Therefore, no matter how grievous his crime might be, the accused was accompanied to court by his relatives. If his own lineage members refused to do so, his mother's patrilineage was duty-bound to come to his aid. These relatives believed that they would incur ancestral wrath if they refused to help him.

As soon as the accused or the litigants arrived at the district chief's compound, a page notified him that the people of such-and-such a village had brought him a case. If it was after dark, the chief told his police to take charge of the litigants until morning; otherwise he prepared to convene the court. When the chief was ready, the page reappeared and alerted the court party, who had been milling about in the courtyard under the watchful eyes of the chief's guards. They ranged themselves at a respectful distance on either side of the chief's chair. When he appeared they arose, and when he sat down they knelt and offered the customary salutation. The litigants and their relatives then gave the chief the customary kola nuts, cowries, and chickens.[5] He, in turn, acknowledged the gifts and inquired about the case. The relatives of the village chief who had accompanied the litigants reported what had allegedly happened; what action, if any, had been taken by the village court; and why the case had been brought to the district court (either because the crime was too serious to be judged on the village level,

He was also liable to be put in stocks for several days, and when released he was warned against visiting the local markets, where he might be tempted to renew his illicit relations. A nobleman convicted of adultery was often merely warned or fined, since his movements could not be restricted. But if a man caught his wife and another man in *flagrante delicto* and killed them, his act was considered justifiable homicide (even if the slain man was a noble), and he went free. If, however, he killed the lover but spared his wife, he had to send her to the chief's household. Here she was made to perform hard work under the supervision of the palace guards until it was believed that she had reformed. A man who was experiencing difficulties with an unfaithful wife and feared he might eventually kill her or her paramour also sent her to the chief's compound for a few months.

The Mossi have always been great creditors and debtors, and cases concerning indebtedness seem to have been next in frequency at the district court. The chief usually dismissed cases of indebtedness brought against minors, because it was considered unseemly for adults to give credit or to loan valuable property to youths not yet of age. Thus, if the minor's family refused to make restitution, the creditor usually had no redress. However, if a woman borrowed property and refused to return it, her husband's lineage was held responsible. Similarly, if an adult male borrowed anything and refused to return it or to do so on time, the case was taken to the local court and eventually to the district court. The creditor was asked to supply witnesses to the loan, and if the chief was satisfied that the loan had been made under the conditions specified, the debtor was ordered to make restitution. If the debtor claimed bankruptcy, the chief ordered that his goods be seized and sold, and that restitution be made to the creditor. If the debtor was truly destitute, his relatives were compelled to pay his debts. The collective responsibility of the babissi for the debts of its members was seen most clearly in cases where men died in a state of indebtedness. The creditors were allowed to summon the debtor's babissi to court, and if proof of the debt was established, the relatives were compelled to repay. If they failed to do so, the chief's police seized and sold their goods to repay the debt.

Cases dealing with violations of civil contracts were somewhat similar. The Mossi did not believe in the axiom *caveat emptor*. If a man sold an animal that died within a week for no apparent reason, the chief ordered an investigation. If it was found that the animal had been ill when sold, the chief ordered that the buyer be reimbursed. If the investigation showed that the animal had been healthy when sold, no restitution was made. Similarly, if a man borrowed an ass or an ox to transport goods and the animal

found to have been justified—that is, if the victim was a thief or a nocturnal intruder—then the accused was acquitted or simply fined. If, however, the accused was found guilty of murder, he was sentenced to die, and the mode of execution was at the chief's pleasure. The chief surrendered the prisoner to his executioners, serfs who lived in the Baglere ward. They took him into the woods and carried out the sentence by strangulation, hanging, decapitation, clubbing, or stoning.

The perpetrator of an unusually heinous crime was often ordered to kill himself with a poisoned arrow. This form of execution was feared most, because it tested the murderer's mettle and called into play the coercive force of his lineage if he proved to be a coward. When such an execution was ordered, the district chief had a poisoned arrow prepared and brought to the murderer's father, his brother, or his father's brother's son. The relative gave the arrow to the condemned man, and, while apologizing for his painful mission, explained that the crime had to be expiated. If the murderer agreed to kill himself, his relatives prepared food and drink for him while his grave was dug. Some proud and brave men helped their relatives dig the oblong-shaped grave required for a murderer; some even insisted on digging it themselves. When both the food and the grave had been prepared, the murderer bade his relatives farewell, took the food and the poisoned arrow, and went into a hut. Here he ate the food and afterward killed himself by pushing the poisoned arrow into his leg. In some cases he had to be provided with a second arrow to hasten his death. If a cowardly murderer refused to kill himself, one of his relatives offered to die in his stead. He told the murderer that death was preferable to the knowledge that his lineage brother was a coward. What would happen, he asked the murderer, if he saw a relative being harmed? Would he choose his own safety rather than run the risk of death? The other relatives asked the same questions, and this subtle coercion was usually sufficient to induce the most cowardly man to kill himself. There are no reports of a murderer's permitting a relative to die for him; life would have been impossible for him afterward. One suspects that if ever a murderer had attempted to elude his fate, the district chief would have had him executed.

The district court also prescribed capital punishment for individuals convicted of arson, abduction, witchcraft, or lese majesty. A person convicted of willfully setting fire to someone's hut or crops was put to death even if no one was killed in the resulting fire; he was held to have jeopardized the life and livelihood of his victims. Similarly, the rare person convicted of threatening the well-being of others through the practice of witchcraft was usually tortured and killed. Conviction usually followed the testimony of witnesses or the confession of the accused.

be related to her was tried and executed. In some cases, he was put to death without a trial. Adultery with a royal wife was considered so reprehensible that both adulterers were publicly beaten to death. Their bodies were denied burial and were thrown into the bush to be eaten by vultures. The Dapore Naba and the Baglere Naba seized and retained the man's property.

Men who committed treason against the Mogho Naba were usually killed before they could be tried. Chiefs and nobles who were suspected of treason and who consented to come to Ouagadougou for trial were deposed and executed if found guilty. Those who were found innocent were released and sent back to their chiefly duties. The sole exception on record to this general rule was the case of Naba Yemde, a Dim of Boulsa province. He had fought and defeated the forces of Mogho Naba Sanum, and when the Mogho Naba sent a larger army and routed him, he was treacherously delivered to the monarch by another Dim. Sanum found Yemde innocent of treason, but had him executed because he had violated another rule: as the descendant of a Kourita, he had come face to face with the Mogho Naba, thus jeopardizing the monarch's life. This exception is always cited by the Mossi when the inevitability of execution for treason is brought up. Actually, a person accused of treason rarely went to court. He either took poison or died in battle against the royal forces. As a posthumous punishment, his compound was burned, his property seized, and his relatives and servants sold into slavery outside the country. Thus, the supreme penalty was not merely the death of a traitor but the permanent banishment of his entire lineage.

did not derive any revenue from his judicial functions. He could not levy a fine against any malefactor. However, his intermediary position between the villagers and the district chief did permit him to obtain some revenue whenever commodities moved from one level to the other.

The officials who administered the villages for the district chief received part of their revenue from the villages under their charge. These local administrators had no courts or retainers comparable to those at the provincial level. However, they did have a large number of wives who contributed valuable agricultural labor. These administrators were permitted to ask the village chiefs for sosose on their own fields several times during the planting season, but—unlike the district chiefs—they were not permitted to have the villagers cultivate special fields for them. In return for any help received, they had to provide food and drink for the workers.

The administrator received most of his revenue as a by-product of active duty in the villages. When he visited a village or transmitted a message to a village chief, he almost invariably received a sheep, a goat, a chicken, or some millet, from the village chief. He also acquired large quantities of goods during the village interregnum: he received gifts from the chief's heirs during the chief's funeral; he received additional presents when they took the fado to the district chief; he could prolong the interregnum in order to receive as many bribes as possible from contenders for the nam; and he was handsomely rewarded when the candidate he had backed was finally installed in office.

The extended family was the basic socio-economic unit supporting the Mossi political organization. The Yirisoba received land rights in his saka from his Sakakasma, who had obtained his rights from the village chief. An extended family in need of additional land would seek help from its Sakakasma or its Boodkasma. When the family no longer needed this land, it reverted to the lineage. If all the land granted to the lineage was already occupied, the extended family, through its lineage head, asked the village chief for more land. The chief usually granted this request, unless he had no more weogho available. In this case, the needy Yirisoba sometimes tried to borrow land from his non-kin neighbors. Such a step was not undertaken lightly, however. If a man borrowed land from his own lineage members or from the chief, the land rights reverted to its donors without difficulty. However, if he borrowed land from another lineage and either he or his benefactor died without assuring the return of the land, litigation often ensued. In some cases a man would seek land from his lineage brothers in another village, who let him use some of their land with their chief's permission. Some Yirisobadamba even asked their district chief for

11: Skinner E-5 (1955-1957) 1964
FA28 Mossi FA28

permission to use weogho in the district, and new hamlets arose in this way. A Yirisoba who could not obtain adequate land on which to grow food for his family left the district and sought land elsewhere, especially among his mother's patrilineage. However, village and district chiefs always tried to prevent this because they did not like to lose any of their subjects.

As director of economic activities in the household, the Yirisoba supervised the agricultural labor of his charges. It was he who directed the work of his wives, his sons, and his sons' wives, and supervised the care of the family herd. He provided the cotton, which was carded and spun by the women and woven by the men. It was also his task to ensure adequate clothing for the members of his household; and he sold excess commodities in order to buy salt, kola nuts, bracelets, foreign clothes, and other products imported from the forest and desert zones. In each case, the Yirisoba had to balance judiciously the requirements of his household against his obligations to the community and to the political hierarchy. He had to prevent economic rivalry among his sons, and especially among his sons' wives. He had to make sure that every married member of the household had sufficient time to provide goods and services for his own family, and that foodstuffs were distributed equitably among the wives. Finally, he had to use the resources of the household to build and maintain the nexus of socioeconomic relationships that provided wives for the male members of the household, and to meet his obligations to the political hierarchy.

The Yirisoba also had social and economic responsibilities toward the other members of his babissi and boodoo. He furnished labor and goods to needy lineage members and to non-relatives with whom he had marriage arrangements. Since much of this help was given on the basis of ultimate reciprocity, very little loss was involved. However, the relationship between commoner and noble families was quite different. In theory, the nobles had no claims on the property of the commoners; but in practice, they did claim such rights. Furthermore, commoner lineages often gave the nobles many more wives than the nobles returned. This inequality enabled the nobles to receive more goods and services from their marriage partners among the commoners than they gave in return. The nobles thus took advantage of their power as possessors of the nam, but even membership in the royal lineage did not exempt them from supporting the governmental services at all levels. This duty was incumbent upon every Moaga.

The Mossi people could not refuse to support their political organization, but often complained about having to do so. Many Mossi felt that their rulers were greedy and avaricious and received too many gifts. Some Mossi held that if the chiefs were not placated with goods and services,

[P.126]

VIII

RELIGION AND GOVERNMENT

796
642 RELIGION AND RITUAL played an important role in supporting and preserv-
[769] ing the Mossi political system. Religio-political ceremonies were centered
[776] around the ancestors (Keemse) and the earth deities (Tengkouga); the otiose high god (Ouennam or Naba Zid Ouende) had a very minor role.

769 The political importance of ancestor veneration lay in the fact that every
642 Mossi chief claimed Nyennega of Dagomba and her descendants, Ouedra-
778 ogo and Oubri, as his ancestors. Furthermore, possession of the amulets of Rialle, Nyennega's husband and Ouedraogo's father, legitimized possession
● [613] of the nam. In order to rule, a Moaga had either to be a member of a royal lineage still in possession of the nam or to have received the nam from such
669 a lineage. No Moaga ever tried to usurp the nam of a kingdom or princi-
778 pality without trying to steal the royal amulets at the same time; nor, if his
642 rebellion was successful, did he ever fail to claim that he had stolen the
769 amulets or had received them as a gift. Thus Yadega, who rebelled against his father's brother, Mogho Naba Koudoumie, and founded the Yatenga kingdom, declared that he had obtained Rialle's amulets. He claimed that they had been given to him by his sister, Pabre, who had stolen them from Ouagadougou and had thus deprived that kingdom of any legitimate sanctions for power. Thus, when the Yatenga people declare that they are equal to Ouagadougou, they add that the only "amulets" that still legitimize the nam of the Ouagadougou dynasty are the droppings left behind by Pabre's horse as she fled northward.

769 Similarly, all the princes who founded principalities and proclaimed
642 their independence of Ouagadougou defended their action on the grounds
643 that they, being as close to the main line of descent as the Mogho Naba, were also entitled to rule. The younger sons of deceased Mogho Nanamse
[631] who were banished from the capital as Kouritadamba and who subse-
[634] quently became provincial Dimdamba also stressed their relationship to the royal ancestors. Even those district chiefs whose ancestors had prob-

11: Skinner E.-5 (1955-1957) 1964
FA28 Mossi FA28

ably been younger sons sent to rule in conquered territories claimed that their ancestors were direct descendants of Ouedraogo and Oubri. Thus, to the Mossi, the power to rule was intimately linked to closeness of descent from the royal ancestors. The supernatural power of these ancestors, and the vigilance they were believed to maintain over the affairs of their descendants, were regarded as important factors in Mossi government.

From the moment when the Mogho Naba of Ouagadougou or any other Mossi ruler "drank the namtibo" and thereby received the nam of his ancestors, he had the right—indeed, the duty—to offer sacrifices to these ancestors in the name of his subjects. Every night, throughout Mossi country, the Baloum Naba of every ruler performed an act of supplication (Kwaga Basgha) to the ancestors. He beseeched them to protect the subjects of their descendants through the night, to maintain peace in Mossi country, and to grant health, children, and prosperity to all Mossi. This nightly ceremony was climaxed yearly by an elaborate ritual in honor of the ancestors (called the Basgha in some areas, and the Pelegha, Filigha, or Kinkiriga in others) that began at the highest levels of the government and ultimately linked every Mossi chief and lineage head.

The Mogho Naba of Ouagadougou, like the other Mogho Nanamse and Dimdamba, initiated this ceremony in his own kingdom. His celebration, called "M'barengma," was held at the end of the Mossi agricultural year and after the Soretasgho. Thus, the M'barengma was a New Year's festival in thanksgiving for good crops, as well as the annual Feast of the Dead. A few weeks before the first moon of the new year (the *ki-basgha* or *ki-pelegha*), the Mogho Naba ordered his soghondamba and samande-kamba to clean up the palace buildings and courtyards—an activity intended to notify the ever-vigilant ancestors that preparations were being made to offer sacrifices in their honor. A short time later, the Mogho Naba gave grain from his fields to the Pughtiema so she could prepare millet water for the sacrifices. Present-day Mossi insist that part of the grain came from the first ears harvested that year and part from those of the previous year. This was supposed to symbolize the continuity between crops, mirroring the continuity between the ruler and his ancestors. A few days before the principal ceremony, the Mogho Naba ordered the Larhalle Naba to pour millet water and sacrifice chickens on the graves of former Mogho Nanamse.

Shortly before the ki-basgha moon appeared, the ruler had to leave his palace at night to elude the ancestors, who had been attracted by the preparations and who were expected to be angry when they discovered that the sacrifices were not yet ready. The unjust ruler feared ancestral sanctions; the just ruler that his ancestors might want him to join them. One night he

11: Skinner E-5 (1955-1957) 1964
FA28 Mossi FA28

pleted, the remainder of the ceremony followed the pattern of the Ouagadougou ritual.

During the weeks that followed, the village chiefs and the heads of the larger lineage segments all offered sacrifices to their ancestors. The Pughtiema of each prominent local administrator, chief, or lineage head prepared and poured the millet water as a libation to the ancestors. Whenever possible, each of these personages invited musicians to sing praises to his ancestors. He dressed in his best robe and sat outside his hut to receive presents from his relatives, friends, and subjects, along with their best wishes for the new year, and for long life and prosperity. In return he gave them kola nuts, beer, and food. Thus, in celebrating the Basgha, all the Mossi were united in prayers and supplications to the ancestors, upon whom rested the future of their country and the successful reign of the descendants of Ouedraogo and Oubri.

The earth deity, Tenga, held the central place in the second major religio-political ceremony which linked all Mossi. This ritual, called *Tense* (from *tenga*, "earth") and sometimes *Naba Oubri ma koure* ("the anniversary of the funeral of Mogho Naba Oubri's mother"), was so important to Mossi cohesion that it was banned by the French, and as a result its main features are now unclear. According to tradition, Naba Oubri loved Poughtoenga, his Ninisi mother, so much, and was so pleased with the elaborate funeral he gave her, that he decided to repeat this ceremony each year in the hope that his subjects would be blessed with the bountiful crops and herds which had made the first one possible. Curiously enough, Oubri's mother was not a central figure in the Tense celebration. Instead, great stress was placed on the fructifying powers of the earth and on the importance of the royal ancestors in Mossi life. The juxtaposition and association of the earth deity with Oubri's mother has important implications for the Mossi political organization. Mossi tradition holds that a Ninisi woman was the ancestress of the Mossi of Ouagadougou. Her people probably celebrated the Tense as a fertility rite to their earth goddess, Tenga. The Mossi apparently took over the ceremony and used it both as a fertility rite and as a memorial festival, thus symbolically uniting the conquerors and the conquered.[8]

In contrast to the Basgha, no special date appears to have been set for the celebration of the Tense. It was held sometime before the crops were sowed, but according to Tauxier it was not celebrated at all in Ouagadougou when the previous year's harvest had been poor.[9] Before setting the date for the festival, the Mogho Naba summoned the Larhalle Naba and ordered him to have sacrifices made on the graves of all former rulers. This minister

11: Skinner E-5 (1955-1957) 1964
FA28 Mossi FA28

gift every year to the Imam and to Karamakho Isa, for whom he has great veneration. These are old and wise men who cannot but give him excellent counsel.[18]

The relations between Boukary Koutou and the Moslems of the Sakhaboutenga district show how Mossi chiefs, though pagans, were able to establish viable political bonds with potentially hostile believers of another religion. Boukary Koutou was probably a Moslem "in outward appearance only," as Binger suggests. Nevertheless, it was by being Moslems of this kind that Mossi rulers managed to retain the allegiance of their Moslem subjects. This was their duty as "fathers of their people," and apparently they did it without much hesitation. In this manner, they effectively used religion to bolster their power and sustain their authority.

Ritual connections between the Mossi rulers and the chiefs of surrounding countries enabled them to protect their subjects from foreign attack and to maintain internal cohesion. The numerous reciprocal gifts between the Mossi and such other Voltaic groups as the Dagomba, Mamprusi, and Gurmanche were based on the belief in descent from a common ancestor or ancestress. Ritual and the supernatural thus played an extremely important role in the cohesiveness of the Mossi kingdoms and in the functioning of their governmental processes. Without these ritual factors, it is doubtful whether the Mossi rulers would have been able to maintain such a relatively high degree of control over their subjects, given the relative weakness of their economic resources, communications, and armed forces. In trying to understand why the Mossi retained their autonomy for so long, one must take into consideration the statement made by a French officer a year after the Mossi were conquered: "We must not lose sight of the fact that [the Mossi] have always presented a common front to strangers, and that a single word of command is sufficient to unite them against the invader in the name of kinship and national unity."[19]

The phase of Mossi political history that began when Nyennega left Dagomba and moved northward came to an end with the European conquest. Most French scholars believe that the Mossi were in a state of decadence at the time of conquest and might have fallen to such African conquerors as El Hadj Omar, Samory Touré, or Baba To. The fact remains, however, that these conquerors all skirted Mossi country without entering it. If these African rulers believed that the Mossi were invincible in their unity, it was because the Mossi, through mythical bonds of common descent and actual bonds of kinship, had welded themselves into a cohesive and powerful group.

12:Skinner E-4,5 (1955-1957) 1962
FA28 Mossi FA28

CHAPTER 9

Trade and Markets Among the Mossi People

BY ELLIOTT P. SKINNER

The Mossi represent the dominant population of the Voltaic Republic, numbering about 1,600,000 out of some 3,200,000 inhabitants. They represent the unique example of a group which has preserved its ethnic identity and political autonomy through all the vicissitudes of Sudanic history until it was conquered by the French in 1896. Tradition records that the people who became the Mossi left the Dagomba region in present-day Ghana during the eleventh century and moved into the bend of the Niger River, carving out three large kingdoms and smaller principalities in the process. At the head of these still extant kingdoms are rulers *(Moro Nabas)* who formerly held feudal-like control over the provinces, districts and villages which comprise their domains. The villages, with their patri-local, polygynous, extended family households, formed the basic Mossi settlement pattern. A complex hierarchical administrative apparatus carried the power of the Mossi rulers into the smallest villages, and funneled taxes and tribute back to them. This structure still exists, but of course it has been modified by the French.

The Mossi were and are still divided into stratified royal, noble and commoner patrilineages. Characteristic of this lineage system is a process by which royal sub-lineages descend serially until they merge with the mass of commoner lineages. Below the lineages there once were large non-Mossi groups of serfs and slaves, but these people have now been grouped into lineages and have become Mossicized.

The topography of Mossi country is typical of the Sudanic grasslands. It is an immense plain, some 1,500 feet above sea level and broken only by three low mountain ranges and numerous small hills. The annual total rainfall is between 30 and 40 inches, and falls almost entirely as heavy showers or thundershowers during the period from June to September. So narrow is the margin of rainfall for successful crop cultivation that any variation in the cycle results in low crop yields and a difficult "hungry period" the following year before the new crops are harvested. The Mossi do not practice irrigation, and would have trouble doing so because the three Volta Rivers which drain their territory serve as drainage chiefly during the rainy season. Only the Black Volta has water all year round; the

12:Skinner E-4,5 (1955-1957) 1962
FA28 Mossi FA28

837 man even refrains from making overtures to a woman whose husband's female relatives may be married to a member of his own 589 lineage. He fears that a wronged husband may have the wives of his 413 lineage brothers recalled, thus causing dissension within and between the two lineages. If none of these complications are present, a man seeks out a person who knows the woman and sends a message declaring his intentions. If the response is favorable, the man then buys 831 four large kola nuts (four being the number for a woman), wraps 801 them together with 44 francs, and send them to his lady. This procedure may be followed on subsequent market days without the two parties ever coming into direct contact with each other. Finally, however, a rendezvous is arranged, and on the pretense of leaving the market to visit a relative for several days, the woman goes instead to her lover's village.

837 These casual affairs started at the market sometimes become quite 586 serious, and if for any reason they are sanctioned by the relatives of either the man or the woman, they often lead to the breakup of a 443 marriage. And since the market is the place where disputants of any 574 sort most likely come into contact, it is here that fights over "stolen" wives break out.

837 This pattern of extramarial relationships centering around the 443 market place is so common among the Mossi that the younger men, and even some of the older ones, are disappointed with the "market" when their mistresses do not appear. Mossi men who sit under the shelters around the market place can usually give an inquirer not only the name of a woman, the name and village of her husband and father, but also the name and village of her paramour. Characteristically enough, they are always "ignorant" of the escapades of their own female relatives or of the wives of their lineage members. The only 593 time when men act as though their relatives might be involved in 443 extramarital affairs is when for some purpose or another a man has to recall a wife or daughter who has gone to visit a relative in another village or district. Regardless of how pressing the problem may be, a man will seldom go directly to his father-in-law's house to recall the woman. He goes to the market nearest to his in-laws' village, and seeks his wife there. If he does not find her or any of her relatives, he goes to the part of the market in which people from her village sell their products and sends a message to her family that he will come for her the next day, or that he would like her to come home.

443 A market place is also one of the best places to look for news of a 203 runaway wife, or of any stranger in an area. The Mossi say that women have footprints like an elephant in that they can be found quite easily, but that the footprints are always clearest in the market.